

Message Text

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TAGS: SPOP, SOCI, BL, EAID

SUBJ: CHURCHMEN RAISE BIRTH CONTROL ISSUE AGAIN

1. SUMMARY: BOLIVIA CARDINAL MAURER LAST WEEK DENOUNCED THE EXISTENCE OF BIRTH CONTROL PRACTICES IN BOLIVIA IMPOSED BY QUOTE FOREIGN POWERS UNQUOTE. THE GOB MINISTER OF HEALTH STATED THAT THE GOB OPPOSED RESTRICTIONS OF BIRTHS BUT DEFENDED RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD. PRESIDENT BANZER THEN RESTATED GOVERNMENT OPPOSITION TO BIRTH CONTROL AND ADDED THAT ACTIONS WOULD BE TAKEN AGAINST INSTITUTIONS ENCOURAGING THIS PRACTICE. HOWEVER, THIS SEEMS UNLIKELY SINCE VIRTUALLY NO PUNITIVE MEASURES ARE TAKEN EVEN AGAINST ABORTIONISTS. GOB MINISTRY OF HEALTH OFFICIALS DO NOT RPT NOT EXPECT ANY PROBLEMS AND INTEND TO DEFEND THEIR POSITION OF RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO LA PAZ DAILY HOY, PRESIDENT BANZER DURING A SEPTEMBER 13 VISIT TO SUCRE DECLARED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE MEASURES AGAINST INSTITUTIONS THAT ENCOURAGE THE PRACTICE OF BIRTH CONTROL IN BOLIVIA. REPORTEDLY HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT VIEWED WITH ALARM THE INFORMATION FROM THE CHURCH OVER THIS PARTICULAR ISSUE. IT IS NOT OUR POLICY TO CONTROL BIRTHS AND THIS ATTITUDE IS JUDGED INHUMAN, THE PRESIDENT REPORTEDLY COMMENTED.

3. PRESIDENT'S REPORTED REMARKS UNDOUBTEDLY WERE PROVOKED BY THE STATEMENT OF CARDINAL CLEMENT MAURER IN SUCRE SEPTEMBER 8. PRESS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REPORTED CARDINAL'S DENUNCIATION OF QUOTE IMMORAL PRACTICES OF

LIMITING BIRTHS UNQUOTE TAKING PLACE IN BOLIVIA. CARDINAL REPORTEDLY STATED THAT THERE HAD ARRIVED IN BOLIVIA QUOTE THE ROAD TO ITS OWN DESTRUCTION WITH THE MISNAMED FAMILY PLANNING IMPOSED BY FOREIGN POWERS THAT VIEW WITH EVIL EYES THE DESIRES FOR PROGRESS, DEVELOPMENT AND THE LIBERATION OF BOLIVIA UNQUOTE. HE LATER STATED THAT THE CHURCH MUST OPPOSE PUBLICLY THIS DEVELOPMENT BECAUSE OF THE LARGE SUMS INVESTED TO CONVINCE MOTHERS TO PRACTICE BIRTH CONTROL. THE CARDINAL MADE THE STATEMENT DURING A MEETING IN SUCRE OF THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL.

4. THE CARDINAL'S ALLEGATIONS PROVOKED A STRONG STATEMENT FROM GOB MINISTER OF HEALTH JORGE TORRES NAVARRO SEPTEMBER 11. MINISTER TORRES STATED THAT THE CARDINAL'S STATEMENT WAS CONFUSED IN ITS CONCEPT AND UNCERTAIN REGARDING THE CRUX OF THE PROBLEM. THE MINISTER THANKED THE CHURCH FOR COINCIDING WITH THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF THE GOB WHICH ADVOCATES A POLICY CONTRARY TO THAT OF BIRTH CONTROL BUT SUPPORTS RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD. HOWEVER, THE MINISTER THEN EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN OVER DENUNCIATIONS WITHOUT PROOF, SUCH AS, THE RECENT CHARGE THAT CARITAS WAS DISTRIBUTING FOOD CONTAINING STERILIZING ELEMENTS. HE POINTED OUT THAT CARITAS DEPENDS ON THE BISHOPS COUNCIL OF WHICH MAURER IS PRESIDENT. FURTHERMORE, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THERE IS A POLICY OF RESTRICTING BIRTHS. FINALLY, THE MINISTER DEFENDED THE RIGHTS OF A MARRIED COUPLE TO PRACTICE RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD TO CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN WELL, TO AVOID BEGGARY, MISERY, MALNUTRITION, PROSTITUTION, DRUG ADDICTION, AND FINALLY MOST SERIOUSLY THE CRIME OF ABORTION.

5. COMMENT: THE PRESIDENT APPARENTLY REALIZED THE CONTINUING STRONG FEELINGS OF THE CHURCH REGARDING BIRTH CONTROL AND HOPED TO AVOID FURTHER PUBLIC DEBATES OVER THIS DELICATE ISSUE. USAID HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING DEVELOPMENT OFFICER HAS SPOKEN TO OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH REGARDING CHARGES OF CARDINAL AND OTHERS AND GOB REBUTTALS. ALTHOUGH THEY DO NOT EXPECT ANY FURTHER GOB ACTION ON THIS MATTER, THEY ARE ALSO DETERMINED TO MEET ANY FURTHER CHALLENGES FROM THE CHURCH. THEY WILL TRY SERIOUSLY TO AVOID POLEMICS WITH CHURCH OFFICIALS BUT THEY INTEND TO REMAIN FIRM REGARDING THEIR ADVOCACY OF RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD.

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6. GOB PROBABLY WILL RECEIVE MORE CRITICISM IN THIS AREA. FOR EXAMPLE, LA PAZ CATHOLIC DAILY PRESENCIA RAN AN EDITORIAL SEPT 15 CRITICIZING GOB POLICY OF "RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD" AS A COVER FOR GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGEMENT OF RESTRICTING BIRTHS. EDITORIAL ALSO CHARGES THAT GOB CAMPAIGN TO LIMIT BIRTHS IS SUPPORTED BY FOREIGN FUNDS. HOWEVER, A LONG TIME CRITIC OF FAMILY PLANNING, PRESENCIA'S EDITORIAL WAS NOT SURPRISING. IT DOES ILLUSTRATE THE CONTINUING SENSITIVITIES IN BOLIVIA TO

BIRTH CONTROL ISSUES.
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